

Volunteer Satisfaction Surveys: Assess What Volunteering Means, Not What It Feels Like

We often ask volunteers questions that reveal if our volunteers are happy with us. If we've been nice and met their needs. But satisfaction surveys can be more than a report card.

A more revealing set of questions might get volunteers to reflect on the content and purpose of their work on behalf of your mission. This will elicit information about how they are being treated by the organization, but shares responsibility with volunteers for increasing their own effectiveness. Here are some possible questions that lead to such mutual assessment:

- Are we asking you to do significant work? If you don't think so, please explain what might add meaning to your assignment.
- What do you think are the most important things you do for the recipients of our services? How do you know these are valued by our clients?
- What do you think are the most important things you do to support the paid staff?
- Did you encounter any problems this year in doing your work? Please describe briefly and explain how (if) the situations were resolved.
- Is there any need or gap in service you have noticed that might have potential for additional volunteer work (not necessarily by you)?
- Have you been given feedback or overheard comments by our clients – positive or negative – that you wish to pass on to us?
- Have we asked you for advice on anything? Have you provided any suggestions or input to us? (If not, why not?) How was this information received and/or used?
- What can we do to be more supportive to you in accomplishing your work?
- What training or access to information would help you to be more effective as a volunteer?
- In just a few sentences or phrases, please tell us how you describe our agency and its work to your friends and family.
- Do you have a talent or skill that we have never asked you to put to use in your work for us (but would be happy to do so)?

These sorts of probing questions are not conducive to easy multiple-choice check boxes and require some thought to answer. But the responses will be much more meaningful, both to help volunteers be thoughtful about the value of their time and effort, and in giving you information to improve volunteer involvement.

Focus on the Results

We can take this all a notch higher by focusing on the *results* of volunteer service. In other words, make an attempt to prove the impact or effectiveness of volunteer efforts. Such questions would have to be setting specific, of course, but here are a few generic ideas:

- What have you observed or heard from clients this year that indicates your services made a difference to them or changed their behavior or circumstances?
- Can you tell whether or not your efforts have had results? What are the indicators?
- Did you meet the goals we mutually set for your work this year? How do you know? Do you think they were the right goals?
- Did anything unexpected occur as a result of your volunteer activities (something that was important to our clients) this year?

The answers we receive to these sorts of questions have far-reaching implications. They will help to position volunteers in everyone's mind as true contributors to the essential work of the organization. This, in turn, improves volunteer/employee relations. The information can also be used in recruiting new volunteers, as it is appealing to get involved with a successful effort.

And here's the kicker: When we can demonstrate that their volunteering makes a difference, guess what? We vastly increase volunteers' *satisfaction* with their service!

Above is an excerpt from Energize Inc.'s June 2012 Hot Topic, *Why Do We Love Volunteer Satisfaction Surveys?* by Susan J. Ellis, <https://www.energizeinc.com/hot-topics/2012/june>; accessed 2/5/2020.

Additional Notes on the Subject:

Paper or web based?

Which will give you a greater return rate? There is no issue with having it available in both forms.

Ideal length?

Just long enough to gather the information you need. Examine every question you think you want to include. Ask yourself, "What will I do with this information?"

Scratch off any *nice to know questions* and only keep the *need to know* questions. No one complains about the length of the survey if the questions are relevant to the responder.

Anonymous?

You need to weigh both sides. You will likely get more honest answers if the survey is anonymous—especially if you suspect there is some sort of unrest or tension brewing. But if someone **is** having issues, and you can't trace the survey back to the respondent, you will be unable to address the problem with them . . . and may potentially lose the volunteer. Susan Ellis suggests that at the beginning of a survey, you ask general questions like, "How long have you volunteered with us? Which program/department do you volunteer in?" This will help you interpret the answers with some context. At the end of the survey, identify the last section as "Optional" and ask for the respondent's name here. Susan usually adds a checkbox for "Is there something you would like to discuss with us privately?" and "May we contact you for additional information?"

Ordering the degree of satisfaction

When using check boxes or a scale, order possible responses so that the *desired response is the first option considered*. Instructions follow that order as well. See below.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Check the corresponding box.

6=Strongly Agree 5=Agree 4=No opinion 3=Disagree 2=Strongly Disagree 1=N/A

Questions	6	5	4	3	2	1
I understand the importance of the work that I perform for this organization.						
I received the training & support I needed to accomplish my volunteer activities.						

Best types of questions to use, multiple choice, check boxes, yes/no, scales, short answer?

Each has its purpose. It is okay to use a variety. If you need to share results to a board, quantitative answers are easier to summarize than qualitative (short answer) but may be more limiting on specific information gathered.

Don't forget! Proof carefully, use plenty of white space, brand appropriately, and say thank you.